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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to provide practical information to persons involved in developing foreign language curriculum materials. The paper describes the development of the Kaleidoscope course, a set of materials designed to cover two years of English at the elementary level. The set consists of a teacher's book, a pupil's picture book, a workbook, picture cards, flannelgraph, and tapes. The course was intended to produce: (1) a positive attitude towards English; (2) confidence and fluency within a modest range of spoken and written English; and (3) listening comprehension skills. The materials were developed over a period of three years: a year of preliminary drafting, a year of testing in schools in nine countries, and a final year of revision. Practical information is provided for all phases of the project, including such information as physical production of the components. (AM)

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WRITING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSE: ONE PROJECT TEAM'S EXPERIENCE - Andrew Wright and David Betteridge

THIS PAPER is intended to give practical help to people concerned with the production of language-teaching materials, both full-time writers and teachers producing their own materials. The authors were members of the Language Materials Development Unit of the University of York. Over a period of three years we have with Nicholas Hawkes, developed materials called Kaleidoscope (Stages 1, 2 and 3), intended for young beginners of English.

A brief description of the Kaleidoscope materials:

Much of the subject-matter of Kaleidoscope is unconventional in foreign-language teaching, many of the topics being drawn from other areas of the school curriculum as well as from a wide range of children's out-of-school interests. These topics include musical instruments, patterns in nature, mathematics, maps and plans, flags, signs and signals.

The Kaleidoscope materials comprise a Teacher's Book, a Pupils' Picture Book, a Workbook for reading, writing and colouring in, Picture Cards, Flannelgraph, Tape for the pupils, and Tape for the teacher. This is a conventional list of audio-visual materials. However, they have an unconventional appearance and are used unconventionally from a traditional audio-visual point of view.

The Teacher's Book reveals a variety of methods, both traditional and innovatory, for making use of the materials of Kaleidoscope. It also includes suggestions for making use of materials brought to school by the children.

The Pupils' Picture Book and Workbook are characterised by the great number and variety of pictures. There are photographs of many aspects of the English-speaking world, and there are a variety of styles of artists' drawings, including some by children.

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There are two sorts of tape provided. One sort of tape gives a model of the language to be used by the teacher and some indication of how the activities might proceed; it is intended for inexperienced teachers. The other sort of tape, for the children, is rich in dramatic stories for developing the skills of listening to an extended flow of English speech.

Our views of materials production as reflected in Kaleidoscope and in this paper have evolved over a number of years. Although we do not think that we are in a position to prescribe to others exactly how to set about writing a foreign-language course, we can describe our own experience and indicate a few principles and procedures that we have developed. We hope that the reader will be able to relate these to his or her own situation

1. Trends in language-teaching at the primary level when the project began

In 1972, when the Project began, foreign-language teachers had begun to question the mechanical repetition prescribed by many audio-visual courses as well as the triviality of much of the content. These features of mechanical repetition and triviality of content were being replaced in other areas of the curriculum by a problem-solving approach and a concern for relevance and interest.

In February 1972 an AILA/FIPLV conference was held in Uppsala to review the teaching of foreign languages in the primary schools. The main conclusions of the conference were summarised as follows: 'There is an increasing demand that foreign-language teaching should be an integral part of the curriculum, both in terms of the content and in the manner in which the children are expected to learn' (Languages for Younger Children: Recent Trends and New Directions, edited by H H Stern).

At the same time, however, there was the growing feeling in some quarters that nothing was to be gained by an early start in foreign-language learning. Instead of rethinking aims and methods for young beginners, it was suggested that foreign-language teaching should be dropped from the curriculum altogether. Such a defeatist attitude would be unthinkable in other areas of the primary-school curriculum - where any shortcomings usually serve to stimulate calls for improvement rather than calls for retreat. The value of the Uppsala conference was that it called for improvement.

2. Setting up the team

It was decided to appoint three people for three years whose combined experience would cover the following areas: primary-school teaching of all subjects; teaching English as a foreign-language; applied linguistics; writing for children; music; tape production; graphic design; printing; office administration. It was regarded as necessary that each individual team-member should be open to new ideas, should have the ability to work with others, and should be able and willing to put principles into practice within realistic constraints.

A secretary/typist was also appointed.

Help was readily available from other university staff, including those who had themselves written language courses and those able to provide information on topic areas such as mathematics, science and geography.

3. Defining the sort of teaching situation to be catered for

We began by making a list of all the charactertistics of the schools, teachers and children we were going to work for:

Schools Primary schools in industrialised societies, offering English as a foreign language for 1½-2½ hours per week; not necessarily well equipped; without examination requirements.

Teachers Either general class-teachers or English specialists, in both cases sympathetic to the spirit of the recommendations of the Uppsala conference; if inexperienced in teaching English as a foreign language, then prepared to regard the first year of use as a training year for themselves, making full use of the Teacher's Book and the Tape for the teacher.

Children Starting age: 8, 9 or 10; in mixed-ability classes of between 20 and 35 pupils; boys and girls; familiar with the trappings of an industrialised society - for example, cars, television, telephones; with some awareness of the world at large.

Although the characteristics listed above were taken as describing our target teaching situation, we were aware that many schools, teachers and children would have their own individual or regional or national differences. We were aware that, in some countries, children are exposed to a considerable amount of English on television or in advertising, whereas in other countries this is not so. We were aware that different schools would apportion the time available for English in different ways, some preferring short frequent lessons, others preferring fewer, longer lessons. Most importantly, we were aware that different languages and dialects would interfere in different ways with the learning of English.

4. Defining aims

Although the members of the Kaleidoscope team came from different backgrounds and had different proposals for how the materials might be developed, no preconceived idea was held to be sacred. In the first few weeks of work the team studied other courses, read articles and reports, and drafted samples of material. Decisions were no sooner made than revised. As well as learning to work together as a team, we had to familiarise ourselves with the characteristics of the teaching situation to be catered for and to fashion our collective ideas accordingly.

In the course of our discussions, three broad aims for the writing of Kaleidoscope emerged. We wanted to help the children to gain: goodwill towards English, with the belief that it is not just a subject to be learned but a tool to be used for useful and interesting things; confidence and fluency within a modest range of spoken and written English; and ability to listen to and understand the gist of extended English speech.

Our three aims, although briefly stated here, represented for us a summary of perceptions, intentions and beliefs which we worked out between us and came to care about. For example, when we used the term 'goodwill' we were thinking of the need to foster goodwill from the start and to keep it alive throughout the course. It is not sufficient to ask young children to regard the use of English in the distant future as a reason for accepting boring work day by day. Nor is it fruitful, nor educationally justifiable, to try to make intrinsically boring work bearable by spicing it with the occasional game.

By 'English' we were thinking not of adult language used in adult situations but of the real language of children appropriate to children's interests. Furthermore, we were keen to demonstrate that English can be used as an alternative means of communication capable of dealing with things of immediate and personal relevance to the children in their day-to-day lives. We saw English as taking on, in a limited way, the role of an alternative language rather than that of a foreign language in the classroom.

We also saw English as a potential lingua franca available to the children for use, at any time, with foreigners, both in their home town and when on holiday. In such situations, the ability to follow the gist of extended English is vital.

Traditionally, audio-visual language-courses have expected the children to try to to understand every word of a text and then to repeat it. We decided to produce taped material making use of a considerable proportion of language unknown to the children. The children would be expected to develop the attitude and ability to pick out what they know and to make shrewd guesses at the rest, combining this information with information given by accompanying pictures.

5. Establishing the practical limits within which the team must work

We had three years to produce two years' material. During the three years we were expected to try out one year's material in schools in nine countries, to analyse questionnaires and consultants' reports, and to revise the material accordingly. Furthermore, we were expected to learn about the situation in each of the nine countries, to find teachers who were prepared to try out our materials to the exclusion of all others and who would go to the trouble of commenting on their experience and passing on their recommendations. The materials for both the trial in schools and for the revised version were to be produced and printed to fully professional standards.

We had three members in the team and a secretary/typist, rooms in the university, and sufficient money to run the day-to-day business of the Project and to finance the origination and printing of the trial materials.

The components of the materials were determined for us by the teaching situation for which they were intended and by the amount of time and money available to us.

6. Establishing the topics, activities and language of the materials

We wrote down as many topics and activities of interest to young children as we could think of. Each of these we wrote down on a separate piece of paper, detailing the particular aspect of the topic or activity and the language which native English-speaking children and their teachers would need to deal with it. In looking for topics and activities, we concentrated on interest, leaving the consideration of practicality to a later stage so that we could feel free to be as creative as possible.

Of course, some ideas proved to be impractical when we considered them further. They were rejected. For example, some ideas were rejected because they would have required too much preparation on the part of the teacher; others required too lavish a use of materials; others would have been too complicated to explain concisely in the Teacher's Book.

Next we rejected those ideas which seemed to demand language which we considered to be unnecessarily difficult for young beginners.

We now had a collection of potentially interesting and practical topics and activities involving relatively simple language.

7. Grouping topics and activities, and grading the language

We decided to group the topics and activities in units, each of which would last the class two or three weeks. We then arranged the units in a sequence according to probable language difficulty. There were 17 units, which we entitled: People and Names; Places; Where?; Colours and Shapes; Signs and Signals; Numbers and Patterns; Tricky Dicky; Hobbies; Sport; School; Music; Time, Houses and Families; Travel, Housework and Money; Sight; Sound; Radio and Television; and Film.

These topics and, more particularly, the language items associated with them were examined from a language-grading point of view.

We noted down opportunities for bringing back certain language items in later units so that the children would be able to make further use of them in new contexts. We looked at each unit to make sure that there was a good balance between language which was being introduced for the first time and language familiar to the children. In some units, we found that there was too much new language, which threatened confusion from the language-learning point of view and in turn threatened the children's enjoyment of the topic.

In every unit the language was used as native speakers would use it. However, from the point of view of the foreign learner, we judged that some language items were used in such a way or so infrequently as to prevent their meaning and usage becoming clear. We asked ourselves, in these cases, Does it matter? Our answer was decided according to whether or not the language items would be essential to the topics or activities of subsequent units. If they were essential, then we looked for extra activities in which native speakers would make use of the same language items. By adding these activities, we hoped to help the children to see more clearly the meaning and usage of the language items and to achieve mastery of them. To make the picture complete, we should add that on occasion we decided that, while we were at it, we might as well clear up certain language points for their own sake. However, this latter motive played a relatively small part in determining what extra activities should be added.

8. Agreeing on a format for the units

Before starting the job of writing up the agreed topics and activities, it was essential to decide on the different parts of a unit and how to present them to the teacher. It was essential for two reasons. First, as writers we needed a structure to work to; second, the teachers would need a clear and consistent description of what they were asked to do.

We felt that we, and the teachers, should know what a unit was basically about. We therefore agreed that every unit should begin with a brief description of the topic and language. It was also essential for both writers and teachers to know what new language was to be introduced and what language known to the children from previous units was to be re-used. In every unit, we decided there should be taped material for the development of listening skills; songs and rhymes; and a section suggesting to the teacher the language he/she might use for general classroom purposes. The teaching/learning sequences were to be described under a number of agreed headings. These headings were to be as helpful as possible, referring to the type of language use, the topic or activity, and, if relevant, the organisation in the class.

9. Drafting teaching/learning sequences

As we examined the topics and activities and considered the necessary stages in the teaching/learning sequence, we realised that in many cases the sequence to be followed by the foreign children could be similar to the sequence natural to a class of native speakers.

In some of the sequences, we began by recommending to the teacher a short discussion in the mother tongue in which the pupils would be free to make their own contributions and ask questions, thus ensuring that the topic might be studied was clearly identified and of interest to them.

In all sequences, we tried to ensure that a listening stage was provided early on in which the children would listen for understanding, or listen and show their understanding by doing something.

In cases where the activity demanded it, the next stage of the sequence would be to give the children a chance to try out their language in limited amounts, repeating it after the teacher and afterwards practising it in groups or pairs But the context in which this practice would take place had to satisfy the criteria of naturalness and interest.

Often we would add a further stage to the teaching/learning sequence We would give the children the opportunity to use the language they had just learned, combining it with language well known to them, in new contexts.

An example should help to make clear our approach to planning a sequence. In one part of the unit to do with sport, we wanted the children to give a simple questionnaire to their classmates about what sports they liked. There were five stages:

> Discussion in L1. We suggested that the teacher and pupils should discuss the idea of questionnaires in the mother-tongue with a view to comparing the likes and dislikes of a class of English children with their own
>
> Listening for understanding A tape-recording was planned in which some English children would be heard giving their questionnaire, asking each other such questions as Do you like football? What's your favourite sport? We decided to provide photographs of the English children and a written summary of their questions and answers presented as if on a clipboard. From this, the foreign children would get an idea of how to administer a questionnaire and the statistics against which they would compare their own results.
>
> Repetition We suggested that the teacher should ask various pupils in the class what sports they liked. They in turn could then ask some other pupils for their views. In this way, the teacher would ensure that the procedure and language of the questionnaire was understood and mastered.
>
> Recombination Finally, all the children would give the questionnaire to a certain number of their classmates, substituting the names of other sports in the question pattern, Do you like _____?

Sometimes it seemed appropriate, in planning a teaching/learning sequence, to make use of a variety of topics. For example, in dealing with the comparative forms of adjectives, the children studied reflections in distorting mirrors, identikit pictures of faces, the apparent sizes of various countries of the world as shown on two contrasting map projections, optical illusions, and the pitch and duration of musical notes.

10. Looking over the completed draft and making modifications as necessary

Every so often the team looked over the completed drafts of the teaching/learning sequences with a critical eye. To help us in this, we devised a checklist of points to be satisfied. Here is the latest version of the checklist:

Selection of topics and activities Are the topics and activities 1. likely to be of interest to all the children? 2. practical in a mixed-ability class of 20-35 children? 3. varied within each unit and from unit to unit?

In dealing with our topics, are we 4. accurate? 5. sensitive to such issues as sex, class and colour?

In using realistic and comic characters, have we 6 over-used them, with boredom as a likely result? 7. under-used them?

Language Is the language 8. natural and appropriate to the topic or activity?

Concerning the language-grading, have we 9. correctly judged the quantity of language to be learned? 10. put the language items in a rational order? 11. achieved a satisfactory balance of new language items and familiar language? 12. ensured that language items needed later on are adequately prepared?

Are the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing 13. well balanced? 14. appropriate to the contexts in which they occur?

Teaching/learning sequence 15. Does each stage in a teaching/learning sequence fulfil the purpose claimed for it? 16. Have we ensured that, when we want the children to practise a language item, each and every child is given an opportunity to do so?

Use of components Are the components 17. as fully exploited as possible? 18. used in a varied way?

Are the instructions in the Teacher's Book 19. sufficiently clear and helpful for all teachers, even inexperienced ones? 20. consistent in style and format?

11. Physical production of the components

Throughout the work described so far, the Kaleidoscope team kept in touch with the designers, illustrators, photographers, tape-recording specialists and printers who were due to put Kaleidoscope into physical form. In this way, the course could be drafted within the physical limits set by the components. Furthermore, the talents and experience of these experts could be used to stimulate and enhance the ideas which we were developing before they became fixed. We, as writers, were conscious of preparing materials based not only on the written word of the Teacher's Book but on a very rich visual and aural presentation.

From the beginning, we sketched, however crudely, the sort of illustrations that we wanted in the Pupils' Book and Workbook. We roughed out the lay-out of the pages, thus discovering whether or not what we wanted was practical. If we knew of an existing picture or photograph that served our needs we made a note of where it was obtainable or, in some cases, photocopied it, so that the task of the designer, illustrators, etc, would be made easier. The designer was then asked to submit designs based on those roughs and on a detailed written list of our requirements.

The printer was at this point asked to give a quotation on the basis of what was being proposed. If the quotation proved unacceptable, and a lower quotation could not be obtained elsewhere, the proposed visualisation was modified and the Teacher's Book changed accordingly.

When the designer's page lay-outs for the Pupils' Books, and Workbook were approved, we sent all the printed matter (titles, captions, songs, instructions, stories etc) for typesetting, having agreed with the designer what size and style of typeface to use. As soon as the typesetting was done, the designer was in a position to specify the exact size of the illustrations required.

Now it was time for us to brief the illustrators and photographers, explaining the content, style, function and size of what they had to produce. Any picture reference or source material that would make their task easier was handed over. In some cases, we wanted photographs to be taken in a school or in somebody's house, so one of the writing team usually accompanied the photographer

in the role of producer and director. Some photographs were supplied by agencies. Here we had to employ a picture-researcher to select a number of photographs according to our brief, so that we could then make the final selection ourselves. If photographs that we had planned for proved impossible to obtain, we had, of course, to think again about the topic and activity and modify the Teacher's Book accordingly.

In a similar way, if an illustrator made proposals for improving a picture, supposing we agreed, again we would modify the Teacher's Book where appropriate.

A final question and date for the completion of printing was then obtained from the printer.

For the organisation of designs, photographs and illustrations, we found that three to four months was essential; for the printing, one month.

At the same time as seeing to the production of our visual components, we had to organise the production of the tapes. The tapescripts had to be written with sound-effects, pauses etc adequately indicated. The actors who would make the recordings had to be chosen and a recording studio booked. Each actor was supplied with a script and a copy of any visual material that was relevant to it. We thought it important that the actors understand the spirit of what we were trying to do. To achieve this, one of the team attended the recording sessions to give advice and encouragement.

On completion of the printed materials and copies of the tape, we packed and posted them to our trial schools.

12. Trying out the materials in schools

It was essential for us to try out the maerials, because they were new and because we could not be expected to know how they would be received in different countries. We found schools in nine countries prepared to try out the materials. There were schools in rural districts and in towns; there were new schools and old schools, big schools and small. Some of the teachers were native speakers of English; some were less than fluent. Some were experienced in teaching foreign languages; some had never taught a foreign language before. The children varied in age from eight in Italy to twelve in Denmark. In every country except Denmark the teachers were prepared to suspend their use of other materials entirely while using Kaleidoscope.

The trying-out period extended over the best part of a school year. In most countries, we had a consultant/coordinator who distributed the materials, held regular meetings with the teachers, visited the schools and made sure the questionnaires were filled in regularly. When the teachers had completed their trying-out of Kaleidoscope, the consultants helped them to transfer to other materials in order to ensure continuity of learning for the children.

This was not a research project. We rejected a laborious quantification of the experience reported to us by the teachers and consultants. Instead, we set out to respond to it in a creative, indeed subjective way.

As well as receiving questionnaires from teachers, we kept up a correspondence with them and with the consultants. In some cases, teachers came to York, and we visited them in their schools abroad. It was through this personal contact that we came to think of the team not as a trio but as a joint project with the teachers and children.

As the results of the trial came in, it emerged that our basic approach was popular. Teachers and children alike expressed the wish for more topics and activities similar to those included in the draft materials. They also wanted more stories on tape and more songs. All these we were able to provide in the revised version. But here and there our materials were clearly not successful. In spite of our checklist, some teaching/learning sequences proved to be either impractical or unsatisfactory as a means of teaching the new language involved. Of course, there were a myriad of small improvements to be made of a practical nature. For example, the Teacher's Book needed more background information on the topics to be studied; many picture sequences in the Pupils' Book needed a clearer lay-out; and some of the taped stories needed re-recording with a greater attention given to the integration of voices and sound-effects.

13. Working relationships and procedures in the team

In the sections above, we have tried to describe our work in a chronological order and according to certain types of work. In this section of the articles, we would like to jot down in an informal way some of our experiences, which might prove of interest to new material-writers.

No team-member, however expert in his own field, was allowed to make unilateral decisions concerning the writing of materials. He had to convince the other members of the team that what he proposed was right.

Furthermore, team-members were encouraged to contribute ideas in areas where they were clearly not expert, partly because they could well have a fresh vision on the subject, partly to encourage everyone to feel a personal identity with the entire creative act involved in producing integrated materials.

We enjoyed writing Kaleidoscope. Also, we worked according to the principle that, if the children were not likely to enjoy our topics, activities and learning sequences in the mother-tongue, then we should drop them from the materials. To keep our creative feelings alive and relevant to the task, we regarded it as essential for each team-member to keep in touch with children and schools. We read their comics, watched their televison programmes, watched their games and, whenever possible, got them to work out games and ideas for us.

We kept to a regular working day. This was essential in order to build up a strong feeling of a single identity of purpose and, consequently, a singleness of spirit in the materials.

We always felt it necessary to work to an agreed schedule and divison of tasks. However, we were prepared to adapt to changing circumstances. Each team-member, in taking on a task, would agree to a completion date and regard it as his personal responsibility to meet it. In practice, this principle rarely worked out owing to the large number of extra duties falling to a development project.

Now that we have finished work on Stages 1, 2 and 3 of Kaleidoscope, we feel, like Pascal, that the last thing an author discovers is how he should have begun. If we were to start a new project, the result would no doubt, be quite different. However, as a result of writing Kaleidoscope, we feel that we can pass on to other writers some basic procedures for their consideration. These procedures are summarised by the headings of the sections in this paper.

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